

# Who Is a Christian? Part 5

*This series has been interrupted a couple of times, once by a study of Joseph (Gen. 37) and again by an Easter-related study of the fig tree of Mark 11. Hopefully, the series will continue uninterrupted until its completion. So far, we have looked at two of five categories of evidences that define a Christian, Profession and Practice. Once again, the purpose of the articles is to help answer the question “Who is a Christian.” These are not intended to provide a listing of steps to becoming a Christian or even to becoming a better Christian. This series of articles is intended to define what a Christian looks like. I encourage you to respond if you have any questions or need clarity on any point. Thanks.*

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## PASSION

Another aspect of the evidences from 1 John that stands out from among the rest is Passion. More than any other single feature (16 times), John writes that a Christian will love other people, especially other Christians. Of the 62 items that define a Christian or a non-Christian, just over 25 percent of them refer to the Christian’s ability to love others, in general, and especially love for the brotherhood.

All but five of these references to love include a reference to Christian brothers. This means that a Christian will love other Christians, both male and female, and will love the church in general. No person can legitimately claim to be a Christian who does not love the church which is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-20; Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 5:30; Col. 1:24).

A true Christian will have a love for the brotherhood, the fellowship of other believers, which means that he will love the church, which is the body of Christ.

However, this is not the first time that John recorded such a thought. In his Gospel, John recorded that Jesus himself taught this principle to His disciples, including John:

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.  
(John 13:35, ESV)

Are you a Christian? Is some other person a Christian? The answer is very simple: Do you love other people? Do you love other Christians? Does that person you may have questions about love the church? Note that this love is so much more than natural affection, or friendship, or fellowship, or brotherly love. This is *agape*, the kind of intentional, willful love that is passionate and sacrificial in nature.

In the early centuries of the church, church members demonstrated a sincere love for one another and the people around them, so much so that they directly impacted their culture.

Luke wrote in his history of the early church (the book of Acts) that the people of the church lived in “wonderful harmony” and were committed to life together, sharing meals at one another’s houses, “every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God.” Each person’s needs were met by the sacrifices of others in the fellowship.

Luke goes on to tell us that this love for one another within the church was noticed by the community around them to the extent that “fear came upon every soul.” In other words, the people of the community where the church was located stood in awe of what they were witnessing. The church had favor with all the people, meaning that “people in general liked what they saw.”<sup>1</sup>

One commentator remarked that “the humble and consistent lives” of the members of the early church “won the favor of the masses of the community” and silenced opposition.<sup>2</sup> Another wrote that the early church commended itself by its “lovely demeanor to the admiration of all who observed them.”<sup>3</sup>

In truth, this should be the typical reaction of a community to the church. After all, the church is the body of Christ – the physical reality of the resurrected Jesus. In his first historical treatise (the Gospel of Luke), Luke wrote of Jesus, “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

In general, when people met Jesus, they liked what they saw. Crowds followed Him everywhere He went, so much so that, on occasions, He had to intentionally plan to get away from them for a time of rest. One reason may be the level of compassion that Jesus demonstrated towards other people. (Matt. 9:36; Matt. 14:14; Matt. 20:34; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13) And His passion for His disciples and all believers is clearly demonstrated in His pastoral prayer recorded in John 17.

This loving characteristic of the church continued on through the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, and continued to awe the local communities. Tertullian, a major theologian of the time, wrote of the early church “...it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See, they say, how they love one another...See, they say about us, how they are ready even to die for one another...”<sup>4</sup>

In his letter to the Roman Proconsul Scapula, Tertullian wrote, “*This is the rule of our faith, that we love those who hate us, and that we beseech God to bless those who afflict us; and herein lies that goodness which is peculiar to us.* All men love those who love them, Christians alone those who hate them... Christians have no hatred or ill-will at any man, and least of all at Caesar; for knowing him to be set up by *their* God, they must needs love him, and shew him worship (reverence and respect).”<sup>5</sup>

In summary, we have seen two standards in addition to a profession of faith for determining whether or not a person is truly a Christian: Are they actively serving God in obedience to His commands, and do they love others, especially other Christians.

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<sup>1</sup> The references in these paragraphs are based on adaptations of Acts 2:42-47 as recorded in the KJV and *The Message*.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, Alfred. *Barnes' Notes*. Online Bible Edition, Version 4.32.01, July 18, 2014, Copyright © 1987-2014, Larry Pierce, Winterbourne, Ontario, Canada NOB 2VO. Referenced hereafter as Online Bible.

<sup>3</sup> Jamieson, Fausset, Brown Commentary, Online Bible.

<sup>4</sup> Quotation taken from Tertullian's *Apologeticum*. Translated by the Rev. S. Thelwall, 1869.

<http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-05.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Quotation taken from *The Address of Q. Sept. Tertullian, To Scapula Tertullus, Proconsul of Africa*. Translated by Sir David Dalrymple, 1790. [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/dalrymple\\_scapula.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/dalrymple_scapula.htm)